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BENGALURU • THURSDAY • DECEMBER 9, 2021 • ₹7.00 • PAGES 22 • LATE CITY EDITION

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IAF helicopter carrying General Bipin Rawat and 13 others, including his wife, from Sullur Airbase in Coimbatore to Wellington in Ooty, crashes in a tea estate; only one officer survives the accident

TN AIR CRASH KILLS CDS

M SARAVANAN & P S SUNDAR
@Coonoor

INDIA'S first Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat, his wife Madhulika and 11 other defence personnel were killed on Wednesday, when the Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter they were in crashed at Katary near Coonoor in the Nilgiris.

The accident happened when Gen Rawat was headed to the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington to address faculty and student officers of the Staff Course. He was flying from the Air Force Station in Sullur, Coimbatore on a state-of-the-art MI-17V-5 helicopter.

The sole survivor, Group Captain Varun Singh SC, directing staff at DSSC, is being treated at the Military Hospital, Wellington. Wing Commander Prithvi Singh Chauhan, commanding officer of the 109 Helicopter Unit in Sullur Airbase, was the ill-fated helicopter's pilot. He, too, died in the crash.

The IAF has ordered an inquiry to ascertain the cause of the accident. It is believed that the pilot's visibility was affected due to the high amount of mist in the

Gen Bipin Rawat was an outstanding soldier. A true patriot, he greatly contributed to modernising our armed forces and security apparatus. His insights and perspectives on strategic matters were exceptional.

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

a technical snag and attempted a U-turn. It turned north and proceeded about 100 m, caught fire, and rammaged a tree before crashing into a hill. Eyewitnesses said two people — the pilot and a person who appeared to be about 55 years old — jumped out of the chopper before it crashed into the tree.

The locals reached these two officers first, and attempted to carry them on woolen blankets before rescue personnel arrived. Reaching the helicopter itself was more challenging as the personnel had to climb higher up the hilly terrain. The spot of the crash was about 500 m from the nearest motorable road — the Coonoor-Mettupalayam National Highway. Fire and rescue workers, along with defence personnel, started operations around 12.45 pm. They went on till 3.25 pm.

Following the accident, vehicles on the Coonoor-Mettupalayam National Highway were stopped and diverted through Kotagiri.

Gen Rawat was an alumnus of St Edward School, Shimla and the National Defence Academy. He assumed office as Chief of Army Staff on December 31, 2016 and

was elevated as Chief of Defence Staff on January 1, 2020. He is the first serving service chief to have died this way. A statement put out by the Army called Gen Rawat a visionary. "He was instrumental in creating the foundation of India's joint theatre commands and giving impetus to the increased indigenisation of military equipment, a legacy which will be carried on and strengthened by successive generations."

'Saw burning craft fall amid trees'

M SARAVANAN @Coonoor

EYEWITNESSES to the IAF helicopter crash on Wednesday recounted hearing a loud thud and seeing thick smoke, further reducing visibility in the area amid the mist.

"It was around noon when I heard the sound. I rushed outside my house and saw a helicopter that had got tangled in tree branches falling to the ground with fire blazing. I also heard a few people screaming," P Chandhirakumar, an eyewitness at Nanjappachattiram in Vandicholai panchayat near Coonoor said.

He immediately called his neighbour Sivakumar, who alerted the police. "Outside the chopper, I saw two injured men lying on the ground. I suspect they jumped out of the helicopter. Their clothes were burnt and their faces couldn't be identified either," said A Sivakumar (45), another eyewitness.

He told one of the two injured men not to worry. "While I was talking to one of them, he asked me for pani (water). They used woolen blankets to carry both to the main road, which was nearly 500 m away. Soon, fire and rescue services personnel arrived. He also saw another victim near the chopper.

S Das (62), who lives nearby, said the heat around the area was high. "We heard the sound of tree branches breaking, one person screaming for help, and what sounded like a cylinder burst," he added. Another resident, Shankar, said, "The chopper crashed just 2 m from my house. Luckily, my children and I were out of town. Three other houses near the burnt chopper, too, had no occupants."

How it HAPPENED

8.47 am
Boarded
Embraer in
Delhi, landed
in Sullur at
11.34 am

11.48 am
Boarded MI-17
V5 at Sullur

12.10 pm
Chopper
crashes at
Katary near
Coonoor in
Nilgiris district

12.22 pm
Scheduled
arrival time
at Wellington;
missing report
filed as ATC
lost contact

1.40 pm
Fire put off;
personnel still
on ground
as of 9 pm
as wreckage
continues to
radiate heat

5.30 pm
Was to
address 77th
Staff course
at Defence
Services
Staff College,
Wellington



The burning wreckage of the ill-fated helicopter

WHAT LOCALS SAW

Chopper flying low in the valley

Turns right, attempting a U-turn

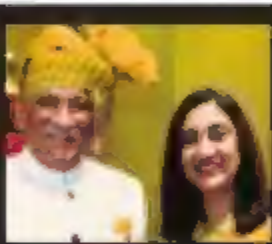
Catches fire

Two people jump out

About 100 m after turning, helicopter rams tree and crashes into hill

We should not rule out anything. Court of Inquiry will look into all possible factors like the weather deterioration, pilot error, material failure or sabotage angle

-Group Captain R K Narang (Retd), former Senior Fellow at IAF think tank Centre for Air Power Studies



Gen Rawat & Madhulika Rawat

THE 13 WE LOST

- Gen Bipin Rawat
- Madhulika Rawat
- Brig LS Liddar
- Lt Col H Singh
- Wg Cdr Prithviraj S Chauhan (pilot)
- Sqn Ldr K Singh
- JWO Rana Pratap Das
- JWO Pradeep Arakkal
- Havildar Satpal
- Naik Gursewak Singh
- Naik Jitender
- Lance Naik Vivek
- Lance Naik B Sai Teja

LONE SURVIVOR

Grp Capt Varun Singh

It is one of the world's most advanced transport helicopters, designed to carry cargo in the cabin or on an external sling

Maximum takeoff weight of 13,000 kg. Can transport 36 armed soldiers internally or 4,500 kg of load on a sling

It is a medium lifter designed on the MI-8 airframe. Can fly in tropical and maritime climates, as well as desert conditions

Can be deployed for troop and arms transport, fire support, convoy escort, patrol, and search-and-rescue missions

Glass cockpit equipped with state-of-the-art avionics, including 4 multifunction displays, night-vision equipment, on-board weather radar, autopilot system. Has rappelling and parachute equipment, searchlight, FLIR system, and emergency flotation system

Belongs to the MI-8/17 family of helicopters; produced by Kazan Helicopters, subsidiary of Russian Helicopters, which supplies helicopters to Russian & Belarus armies. US bought 63 MI-17 V5s for Afghan National Army between 2011 and 2014

India has about 200 of them. IAF tasked with repair and overhaul since April 2019

INSIDE GEN RAWAT LEAVES BEHIND LARGE SHOES TO FILL | P8 EXERCISE BEGINS TO SELECT GEN RAWAT'S SUCCESSOR | P9 CONSTRUCTION STOPS, RELATIVES FLY BACK | P9 MOST NASTY SIGHT, RECALL RESCUE MEN | P9 MULTI-FACETED OFFICER AND GREAT THINKER | P9 EXPERTS SURPRISED AT 'SAFEST' FLYING MACHINE'S TRAGIC END | P9

RBI chooses growth over inflation, keeps key policy rates unchanged

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@New Delhi

CHOOSING growth over inflation, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday kept both the repo and reverse repo rates unchanged at 4% and 3.35%, respectively, proving most forecasts of a 15-20% hike in reverse repo rate wrong.

Repo is the interest rate RBI charges from banks for lending money to commercial banks to meet their short-term fund needs, while reverse repo rate is what RBI offers banks for parking their funds with the central bank.

RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), which determines the central bank's rates required to achieve the inflation target, also maintained its 'accommodative stance as long as necessary to revive and sustain growth on a durable basis'.

The committee acknowledged the immediate inflation risks but expressed hope that inflation would be trending down in the medium term. It predicts inflation to peak in the fourth quarter (at 5.7%) and cool off subsequently.

"CPI inflation is projected at 5.3% for 2021-22 - 5.1% in the third quarter; 5.7% in the fourth quarter, with

GDP growth pegged at 9.5% in FY22

RBI has kept GDP growth projection for FY22 unchanged at 9.5%. According to its estimates, the economy would grow at 6.6% in Q3 and 6% in Q4. Real GDP growth is projected at 17.2% for Q1 and 7.8% for Q2 of FY23

risks broadly balanced. CPI inflation is then expected to ease to 5% in the first quarter of 2022-23 and stay at 5% in the second quarter," RBI said in its policy statement.

Although the central bank expressed its concern over core inflation, which it said needs to be closely monitored and held in check, the top leadership of the central bank reiterated that the MPC's decision is based on headline inflation and not core inflation.

Core inflation - Consumer Price Index-based inflation excluding food and fuel - remained elevated at 5.9% during September-October. According to the MPC, in order to bring down core inflation, the normalisation of excise duties and VAT alongside measures to address other input cost pressures must be pursued vigorously. P13

EXPRESS READ

Three LeT militants killed in J-K's Shopian

Srinagar: Three Lashkar-e-Toiba militants were killed in an encounter with the forces in Shopian, Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday. Police identified them as Amir Hussain, Rayees Ahmad and Haseeb Yousuf.

Olaf Scholz voted in to replace Angela Merkel

Berlin: Germany's parliament elected Olaf Scholz as Germany's ninth post-World War II chancellor on Wednesday, opening a new era for the EU's most populous nation and largest economy after Angela Merkel's 16-year tenure.



PLATFORM FOR PANDEMIC?

Amid fears looming over a potential spread of the Omicron variant in Karnataka, scores of people continue to arrive by train from other states, at Krantivira Sangolli Rayanna railway station in Bengaluru on Wednesday | ASHWIN KRISHNA HP

NATIONWIDE	DEC 07	DEC 08	KARNATAKA	DEC 07	DEC 08
Fresh cases	6,822	8,439	Fresh cases	299	399
Recoveries	10,004	9,525	Recoveries	260	238
Deaths	220	195	Deaths	6	6

SKM accepts fresh govt proposal, may end stir

HARPREET BAIWA @Chandigarh

THE Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella body of protesting farmer unions, on Wednesday accepted the Centre's revised proposal in-principle but a decision on whether to call off the stir will be taken on Thursday. According to sources, the SKM is awaiting a formal communication from the government on its official letterhead.

Earlier in the day, the five-member committee constituted by SKM met at the Singhu border to discuss the government's revised proposal accepting most of the farmers' demands to end their year-long stir. The fresh proposal was discussed in detail in the meeting and a consensus was reached to accept it, said Harinder Singh Lakhwala, general secretary, BKU (Lakhwala Group) Punjab. On whether the government has accepted all the pending demands of the farmers

including the contentious MSP issue, Lakhwala said the main issues seem to have been addressed but the full picture will be clear only after the Centre sends an official letter.

The farmers had not accepted the earlier proposal sent by the Union home ministry following which the Centre revised the proposal.

"We are in agreement with the government regarding our demands. A consensus has been reached on the fresh proposal. However, no decision has been taken yet on calling off the agitation," said Gurnam Singh Chaduni, president, BKU (Chaduni group).

Farmer leader Shiv Kumar Kakka said, "We are hopeful. Things are progressing and moving forward."

Another farmer leader, Yudhvir Singh, said, "The ball is now in the government's court and a final decision will be taken tomorrow."

Ishad mangoes, Kumta onions, Bhatkal jasmine start journey towards GI tag

The sweet onion of Kumta, which will soon receive a GI tag, being arranged for sale | EXPRESS



SUBHASH CHANDRA NS @Karwar

THEY are unique, popular and are grown in small areas for the last several centuries. Delicious Ishad mangoes from Ankola, sweet onions from Kumta, betel leaves from Honnavar and fragrant jasmine from Bhatkal are all set to get geographical indicator (GI) tags as the Horticulture Department has started

the process.

The GI tags will catapult them to international fame and recognition, helping local farmers along the way. "We have started the process to get GI tags for these crops. We have collected the required data to be furnished to the Directorate of GI, based in Chennai," said Satish, Deputy Director, Department of Horticulture, Karwar.

"The sweet onion does not have the pungent smell associated with other types of onions. Of late, there has been a demand from far-off places. You cannot miss this onion tied in bunches. It is a perfect crop to be get the GI tag," said SV Hit-talamani, former director of the Horticulture Department. "Black Ishad mango from Ankola is tasty and pulpy. Ear-

lier, it used to be canned and exported. We hope to revive its past glory," said Satish.

The Honnavar betel leaf, known as the queen leaf, is grown only in a few pockets of the taluk. "It is being cultivated for over 500 years. It was said to be patronised by the famous queen Chennabhai Devi, who is also known as Pepper Queen," he said. P7



ROHIT SHARMA REPLACES KOHLI

With Team India's unceremonious World Cup exit, the BCCI on Wednesday ended Virat Kohli's run as India's white-ball captain, handing the reins to Rohit Sharma. P17